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BSSC

Bay State Skills Corporation

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The Bay State Skills Corporation

The Bay State Skills Corporation (BSSC) is a quasi-public corporation created in July 1981 to respond to the rapidly changing nature of our economy. Its basic purpose is to award grants to educational institutions which link up with one or more private companies and together train people for jobs in high growth fields. But the BSSC is also an effort that reflects important lessons learned.

As long as government compensates only for its failing industries, it can at best merely slow the rate of economic stagnation. By encouraging its technologically successful companies, Massachusetts controls the transition from declining industries to its future — computers, robotics, numerically controlled machines, biotechnology, and others which are coming upon us so suddenly.

American managers have long complained that when they go head to head with Japanese and European competitors, the margin of victory is often the government support and cooperation they receive.

BSSC is one part of Massachusetts state government's commitment to generating the growth environment necessary to maintain technological preeminence. When a major computer manufacturer wanted to expand into robotics but found no trained labor pool, it linked up with the Bay State Skills Corporation which provided fifty percent of the funds. The result is a robotics training center which is now being put into place at a Massachusetts university. We are just beginning to understand the exciting possibilities created by the interaction of educational institutions, private industry, and the Bay State Skills Corporation.

The Corporation's Mandate

Since 1981 BSCC's mission has grown and developed. Its mandate is:

- to encourage and facilitate the formation of cooperative relationships between business and industry, labor, government, and education to develop and expand programs of skills training that are consistent with employment needs;
- to provide grants-in-aid to education and training institutions, to be matched with private sector financial support, to fund skills training programs in growth occupational areas;
- to collect and disseminate information on present and future employment needs as well as the availability of skills training and education on these areas; and
- to conduct conferences and studies which will increase communication and information on employment needs of the Commonwealth.

The activities of the Corporation are governed by an 18-member Board of Directors. The Board is chaired by Evelyn E Murphy, State Secretary of Economic Affairs and made up of individuals from business and industry, skills training, government, education, and labor. One-half of the Board is made up of representatives of business and industry. The Bay State Skills Corporation's professional staff is directed by Susan K. Moulton, Executive Director.

Focus on Growth Occupations

The BSSC funds programs in a wide variety of occupational areas: — machine operation; precision machining; nuclear medicine technology; respiratory therapy; word processing; data entry; microwave engineering; computer-aided drafting and design; electronics; and advanced automation and robotics. The training spans entry level, retraining, and employee upgrade training, as well as advanced level University and college education. These programs foster BSSC's goal to expand the number of skilled workers available for Massachusetts companies.

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BSSC As A Catalyst

The training can take place at community colleges, vocational schools, CETA skills centers, four-year colleges, universities, and community-based manpower organizations throughout the state. The BSSC acts as a funding organization and a catalyst to the public-private training partnerships.

BSSC's unique features include the following:

a. businesses must be actively involved in planning, designing, operating, and monitoring education and training programs, so that these programs will meet their needs;

b. businesses may contribute their time and expertise which can be translated into cash, personnel, equipment or materials, space and other items of financial value to the programs — in most cases, equal to or greater than each BSSC grant award;

c. BSSC is not restricted to training only the unemployed or poor. Because employers' major criteria are the need for skilled workers, BSSC's primary focus is on training people for jobs, regardless of their economic need;

d. the programs can cover a variety of training levels, including entry level training, employee upgrading, retraining, and advanced (college and university level) programs, and can run from 20 weeks to 20 months;

e. the training is provided in a wide variety of new and emerging occupations — such as nuclear medicine technology; computer-aided design / computer-aided manufacturing; plastics technology; and advanced automation and robotics, in addition to the more traditional occupations of the machine trades, licensed practical nursing, and junior accounting training.

The Growth of the BSSC

Since the creation of the BSSC in July, 1981 and its initial funding with $3 million in state funds for matching grant programs, the Corporation has taken on additional responsibilities in the skills training area as well. These include:

- the administration of a program of Supported Work for the Mentally Retarded — a program whereby mentally retarded adults are provided with work in a structured private sector work environment and develop their skills and work habits to the point where they can work independently in unsubsidized jobs;
- a Displaced Homemakers program, which funds three multi-purpose displaced homemakers centers across the state which provide counseling, job seeking skills training, other support workshops, and referral to jobs and further education and training ("displaced homemakers" are individuals at least 35 years of age, who have worked in their homes for a number of years providing household services for their families, who have been dependent on others for financial support, and who are now required to enter the labor market and achieve financial independence).
- training programs for individuals with particular employment needs — individuals who have lost their jobs due to budget cutbacks necessitated by Proposition 2½; individuals who have lost their jobs due to plant closings or large industry layoffs; public assistance recipients; and unemployed youth.

The Corporation's current two year operating budget totals almost $8 million.

Accomplishments to Date

Over the past year and a half the BSSC has:

- awarded over $6 million in grants-in-aid for 76 programs of skills training and education which will train over 5,000 individuals;
- worked with over 75 education and training institutions and 300 businesses;
- held seminars and conferences on how public-private partnerships can be built; and
- established a Career and Learning Line to provide information on where people can find specific education and training programs.

The Bay State Skills Corporation is one economic development tool that Massachusetts is using to meet the needs of its growing industries. It is an exciting new beginning.